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SUBJECT: GERMANY REACTS STRONGLY TO RUSSIAN RECOGNITION OF ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA

Classified By: ACTING DCM JEFFREY RATHKE FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: German officials reacted strongly to Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia August 26. See para 7 for the full text of a German government statement on the matter. During a visit to Estonia today, Chancellor Merkel said the recognition was "absolutely unacceptable" and expected the EU to take a similar stance. The Russian Ambassador delivered Chancellery Deputy NSA Rolf Nikel a letter stating the Russian intent to recognize the two provinces. Nikel reportedly responded strongly and said the Russian attempt to topple the Georgian regime had failed. German officials reiterated that Russia must face consequences for its actions in Georgia and remained supportive of Georgian President Saakashvili. END SUMMARY

¶2. (C) Chancellery director-equivalent Christoph Israng related that the Russian Ambassador used extremely strong language in delivering the letter, asserting that Georgian President Saakashvili had tried to implement a "final solution" to the South Ossetia question. The Russian Ambassador also claimed that Georgia was "an American project" that had failed. Nikel reportedly responded that it was the Russian attempt to force Saakashvili from power that had failed and took offense at some of the Russian Ambassador's comments. Nikel later informed the A/DCM that the Russian move was "out of line," unacceptable, and contrary to international law.

¶3. (C) Nikel said that Merkel, on the road in Estonia August 26, had worked with her traveling staff to amend her Tallinn speech. (Relevant portions emailed to EUR and NSC.) Merkel called the recognition "absolutely unacceptable." She also said it "contradicts my view of..the principle of territorial integrity, which is a basic principle in international law." Nikel told A/DCM there would be consequences for Russia. The German cabinet holds its weekly meeting August 27 and will discuss Georgia, but elaboration of specific German steps will happen only after the September 1 EU Council meeting, according to Nikel. Despite difficulties with Russia, the German Government reportedly intends to go ahead with October 2 government consultations with Russia. Chancellor Merkel and four ministers would participate. This lineup reportedly is pared down from original plans. Social events planned for the meeting likewise have been struck from the schedule.

¶4. (C) During an August 25 meeting with visiting Congressman Dana Rohrabacher, Nikel repeatedly emphasized that Russia's actions (even prior to recognition) needed to be answered strongly or the Russians would conclude from events in Georgia that might makes right. Merkel today reiterated her demand that the Russians leave Georgia proper and remove the checkpoints from the zones around South Ossetia. Although Nikel acknowledged that stable economic relations between Russia and Germany are important, he said that international

law, German values, and German interests all argued against business as usual. A/DCM today stressed the importance of the NAC meeting tomorrow and the need to remain in contact with Germany for a good result.

¶5. (C) Nikel told Congressman Rohrabacher that Germany would continue to support Saakashvili even though Germany is not a "100 percent fan" of the Georgian President. In Nikel's view, Saakashvili's fall from power would represent the Russians achieving their ultimate objective in the conflict. A Georgian Embassy contact in a separate conversation told Poloff that a leadership change may be desirable after things calmed down, because, in the diplomat's assessment, Saakashvili bore a share of the blame for the armed conflict.

¶6. (C) SPD Chairman Kurt Beck was quoted in German press reports August 26 criticizing the UK and Poland for their reaction to the Russian invasion of Georgia, but without condemning Russian actions. A/DCM raised this with SPD party officials and Deputy Chairman of the SPD Bundestag Caucus Walter Kolbow. The SPD official said Beck was responding to a question and his comments were taken out of context. A/DCM suggested that it would be helpful for the SPD to clarify Beck's position, to avoid any unintended impression of the Chairman's view. Kolbow did not defend Beck's characterization of the issue, but likewise stressed the SPD's desire to maintain contact with Russia, even if Russian actions in Georgia were unacceptable.

¶7. (U) Below follows an unofficial Embassy translation of the Government statement on Georgia August 26.

BERLIN 00001187 002 OF 002

"Recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is unacceptable"

The situation in Georgia was a key issue during Merkel's visit to Estonia. Angela Merkel emphasized together with Prime Minister Andrus Ansip the importance of a united position of the European Union on Russia.

The Russian recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is in violation of international law according to Chancellor Merkel and "absolutely unacceptable". Russia's activities are contrary to the principle of territorial integrity, one of the fundamental principles of international law. Merkel said that now is the time to discuss the common basis of values with Russia. There can be no simple "business as usual". At the same time, Merkel regrets that so far no UN resolution has come about.

"I believe that the entire European Union will speak in this direction," Merkel said after the meeting with Ansip. Next week, heads of state and government of the European Union convene for a special summit on the conflict in the Caucasus.

This European Council is to send a signal that the EU will stand by Georgia's side to help on reconstruction. "As European Union, we must do everything we can to assist both Georgia and Ukraine in the context of our Neighborhood Policy," said the Chancellor.

#### Relationship with Russia Put to Test

The chancellor emphasized in Tallinn again that the six point plan presented by the European Union must be implemented "immediately/right away." She agrees with Minister President Ansip on this point.

Ansip added that the EU's relationship with Russia has to be key issue at the upcoming special summit.

The Russian forces should immediately withdraw from occupied territories, Merkel demanded. It was also important that more international observers get access to Georgia: "In order to shape the regulations in the so-called buffer and security zone, so that the presence of Russian forces there

becomes obsolete," the Chancellor added.

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